WASHINGTON, DC – Four leading farm bill reform advocates in the U.S. House of Representatives, U.S. Reps. Earl Blumenauer (D-Ore), Ron Kind (D-WI), Paul Ryan (R-WI), and Jeff Flake (R-AZ), today criticized the farm bill conference report as a missed opportunity for the serious reform that would make our farm programs more equitable and fiscally responsible. Despite being touted as significant reform, the bill fails to address the most unjustifiable, market and trade distorting aspects of U.S. farm policies.

"At a time when Americans are struggling to pay their mortgage, food and energy bills, we should help people who need it and not lavish resources on people who don't," said Rep. Earl Blumenauer (D-Ore). "With record high farm prices, we should not give money to couples earning up to $1.5 million in farm income and $1 million in non-farm income when most farmers still get little or no help. We should keep some of the farm bill's modest reforms and reject the wasteful investments from the past. The Agriculture Committee has taken this bill as far as it can. Now it is time for the full House to take control. If the president vetoes the bill, we must finish the job by getting more to farmers who need help, meeting our environmental obligations and doing more for the hungry."

"This bill was well designed to avoid every opportunity for serious reform of wasteful, outdated subsidy programs while actually piling on additional layers of unnecessary spending," Rep. Ron Kind (D-WI) said. "Commodity prices are through the roof and yet we are still funneling billions of dollars to farm households making up to $2.5 million a year in profit. I challenge any Member of Congress to justify these outrageous payments to their constituents who are right now struggling with the highest food and fuel costs ever. My colleagues and the President should reject these sham reforms, and demand a farm bill that helps only the family farmers who need it, and is worth the confidence of the American taxpayer."

Farm Bill Conference Report: Where's the Reform?

- The conference report continues to subsidize millionaires. Much has been made of the means test being placed on subsidies. The reality is that by combining on- and off-farm income, households making up to $2.5 million are still eligible for all subsidies. Furthermore, even the very high limit for on-farm income applies only to Direct Payments. According to USDA, these limits could only affect 0.2 percent of producers (4,600 out of two million).
- Cuts to Direct Payments represent a drop in the bucket. At a time when farmers are receiving record prices for their commodity crops, the agreement cuts $300 million from Direct Payments, out of $50 billion, a cut of only 0.6 percent.
- Increases in target prices and loan rates will cost billions in the future. Defenders of the

farm safety net like to point out that prices always fall from historic highs, and they will again. So while these increases may not mean much in the current market environment, they will be here to stay and will cost billions when prices do fall, money that is not being considered in current budget calculations.

"This farm bill is bad policy on several fronts," said Rep. Jeff Flake (R-AZ). "Not only is it market-distorting and fiscally irresponsible, but it complicates our current trade obligations and will continue sending taxpayer money to wealthy farmers and landowners. I know that many of my Republican colleagues experienced buyer's remorse after supporting the last farm bill in 2002. Given that the current bill is no better, I hope that they won't feel compelled to vote for it."

A permanent disaster program is a costly, unnecessary, and harmful additional layer of subsidies. The federal government already bankrolls crop insurance to help farmers when a crop fails, counter-cyclical payments when prices drop, marketing loans to allow farmers to finance a crop and guarantee a price, and Direct Payments for no reason at all. These existing programs are more than adequate for legitimate farming operations. Additional layers of subsidization foster inefficiency and incentivize production on marginal lands that should not support large-scale agriculture. Finally, $2-3 billion is not nearly as much as historical ad hoc payments, so Congress will inevitably be called on to provide billions more in future years.

"The conferees have squandered yet another opportunity for meaningful reform," said Rep. Paul Ryan (R-WI). "The farm bill should be focused on providing a safety net for family farmers in times of need, yet Congress has instead opted to subsidize the wealthy at a time when food prices are surging. Our agricultural policies are in desperate need of commonsense reform and this bill fails to deliver."